

THE BIN LADENS

AN ARABIAN FAMILY
IN THE AMERICAN CENTURY

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signature to the cause. As the son of a Hadhrami immigrant with no formal education in Islam, Osama was not a significant figure in the Saudi world of dissident Islamist scholarship, but his martial reputation as a *mu-jaheddin* leader in Afghanistan and his membership in a prominent merchant family made him a potentially attractive fellow traveler. "He apologized and refused to sign," Al-Gasim recalled. "He said he was very busy with Afghanistan and Yemen. He was supporting the ideas [in the petition draft] but he didn't want any conflict with the Saudi government and lose support for his activities. He didn't want to start another war. He was not convinced that these goals could be achieved in a peaceful way."¹⁷ Some Islamists in Saudi Arabia, justifying their meek resistance to corrupt governance by the royal family, had long cited their desire to avoid fomenting *fitna*, or Koranically undesirable internal division within the Islamic community; Osama relied upon the same rationale that winter.

One night, Osama joined a rooftop dinner meeting in Jeddah where exiled Kuwaiti guests talked about their travails and asked for support, recalled Jamal Khashoggi, who attended. When his turn came to speak, Osama voiced a fear that America had a secret plan to use its presence in Saudi Arabia to "secularize Saudi Arabia, and to make a dramatic change in its regime or the way it ruled by imposing a president and ministers who are secular," as Khashoggi recalled it. Osama specifically named Ghazi Al-Ghosaibi, the suit-and-tie-clad Saudi ambassador to Great Britain, as a candidate for this imposed leadership. Al-Ghosaibi, Osama predicted, would reform curriculums in school to spread secular ideas, "encourage women to take off their *bejab*," and "spread corruption through arts and opening up society." By Khashoggi's account, Osama concluded his remarks with a warning:

Be aware. Be careful. We have to be united and rally around the Saudi leadership in order not to be weak against this determined secular campaign, that is no doubt coming with American support, that already has